

## **The Use of Vocabulary-Games in Improving Children's Vocabulary in English Language Learning**

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### **ABSTRAK**

Kosa kata memainkan peranan penting dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Pembelajaran kosa kata dalam Bahasa Inggris merupakan hal yang tidak mudah terutama bagi para siswa sebagai pembelajar pemula. Selain itu, mereka memiliki karakteristik khusus yang sangat berbeda dari orang dewasa. Dengan menitikberatkan pada perbedaan karakteristik tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa para guru yang mengajar pembelajar pemula memiliki tugas yang menantang untuk dapat memotivasi mereka dalam proses pembelajaran. Dalam hal ini, para guru harus lebih kreatif dan menjauhkan siswa mereka dari rasa bosan saat pembelajaran kosa kata Bahasa Inggris. Mereka harus menyiapkan materi yang akan diberikan kepada para siswa dan juga memilih teknik yang sesuai untuk digunakan. Dengan melakukan hal-hal tersebut, mereka dapat membuat siswa memiliki ketertarikan yang besar dalam proses pembelajaran. Mereka harus mampu memilih dan menggunakan teknik-teknik pengajaran yang dapat membuat proses pembelajaran menjadi lebih menyenangkan, menarik, dan menggembirakan bagi para siswa. Salah satu teknik tersebut adalah menggunakan permainan di dalam kelas. Menggunakan permainan dapat memberikan banyak keuntungan bagi para guru dan siswa. Berdasarkan hal tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa menggunakan permainan dalam pembelajaran kosa kata Bahasa Inggris sangatlah efektif, karena menggunakan permainan sangat menyenangkan dan cocok dengan karakteristik anak-anak sebagai pembelajar pemula.

**Key words:** Vocabulary, Young Learner, Games

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In learning a language, both mother tongue and foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that connects the four language skills all together. Vocabulary should be integrated into the teaching of those four skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers cannot teach vocabulary independently, unless the learners especially children as young learners will get confused and maybe frustrated in learning English. In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately.

In reality, English as a foreign language is taught separately from the language skills. The teacher gives the vocabulary, asks the learners to write it down in their notebooks, and then finally they have to memorize it for the next meeting. This traditional way is quite boring even makes the learners hate English language lesson.

The teacher should give the materials through an interesting technique in order to make the learners enjoy the teaching-learning process. As Nation (in Linse, 2006:122) claims that “teachers should facilitate vocabulary learning by teaching learners useful words and by helping learners figure out meanings on their own”. Moreover, the learners are children who love to play and learn best when they are enjoying themselves.. They are not always aware that they are learning language.

Thus, this article will examine the use of games as one of strategies in learning vocabularies for young learners. It will begin with the concept of young learners and continue with kinds of games which can be used in learning vocabularies for young learners.

## **2. CHILDREN AS YOUNG LEARNERS**

Before talking too much about young learners, it is needed to identify who young learners are. Many experts describe this term in different ways. Phillips (2003:5) claims that young learners are children from the first year of formal schooling (can be five or six years old) to eleven or twelve years of age. Similar with Phillips, Slattery and Jane (2001: 4) also give the same description. They mention that young learners are aged seven to twelve years old, then age under seven years old categorized as very young learners. While, according to Scott and Ytreberg (1990:1) young learners are between five and ten or eleven years old. While Cameron (2001:15) adds that young learners include children between seven to fourteen years old. Basically, they have nearly similar description; the age range is not too wide. In this article, young learners are children aged five up to seven years old or kindergarten students.

Defining young learners is important since there are a lot of perceptions in classifying who they are. It is useful in order to know their characteristics more. If we make wrong understanding, we will get serious problem. Although the range is not too wide, they have different characteristics. Slattery and Jane (2001,4) point out that young learners:

- 1) acquire through hearing and experiencing
- 2) learn through doing things
- 3) love playing, learn best when they are enjoying, and using their imagination
- 4) love playing with language sounds

- 5) are not able to organize their learning
- 6) their grammar will develop gradually on its own
- 7) understand situations more quickly than the language used
- 8) use language skills long before they aware of them
- 9) have a very short attention and concentration span and so need variety
- 10) are comfortable with routines and enjoy repetition
- 11) respond the language well through concrete things (visual things) rather than abstract things, and
- 12) need physical movements and real activities to stimulate their thinking

Those characteristics are very helpful in deciding the way of teaching. It can be as a consideration for the teacher on choosing an appropriate technique in teaching young learners. Teacher should make the lessons playful and full of physical movement with varied activities (do not give them the same activities day by day). Some activities are indoor and some outdoor, some quiet and some noisy, and it can be moving, sitting, or standing. Children will find them more enjoyable, be more motivated and remember the language better. They do not realize that they have learnt something. For them, this is incidental. Children love playing with sounds. They like to imitate and make funny noises. They can generally imitate the sounds they hear and copy the way the adult speaks. Moreover, they are comfortable with routines and repetition. The teacher can use this in playing games, singing songs, saying rhymes together. Unconsciously, they get something from those activities. Although the children are not able to read and write, it is not a big problem. The teacher can substitute with telling simple stories, or using gestures, actions, and pictures to demonstrate what the teacher means. Whatever the technique and method the teacher uses the main thing is that he or she should keep in mind that they have to make the English learning enjoyable and fun. It is a must because they will learn best when they are enjoying themselves. Otherwise, they will get bored easily and don't care of the lesson.

### **3. TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS**

Vocabulary is one of the components of a language, besides sound system, grammar and culture. Students who want to learn a target language, in this case English, of course have to learn those elements.

Teaching vocabulary plays an important role in language acquisition because the mastery of vocabulary will help students master all the language skills- speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Vocabulary will make students practice the structure more easily. It is

useful for students in order to communicate in daily life and will strengthen belief that English can be used to express the same ideas or feelings they express in their native language (Finocchiaro, 1974:38). In the teaching of English vocabulary to young learners, teachers are expected to have the skills of language in simple English. In other words, the teaching of English aims at giving introduction to the language, which means that the teaching processes have to utilize the existing context of situation. Teachers have to do this because teaching English to children is different from adults, especially in vocabulary teaching. Teachers should try to give as clear as possible the explanation of the meaning of the words being taught by using a technique. Nation (1928:27) states that a good vocabulary teaching technique has the following things: (1) It interests the learners. (2) It makes the learners give attention to the form meaning or use of the words. (3) It gives a chance for repetition. It affirms that choosing carefully and correctly the vocabulary which appropriate for children is the important things for teachers to consider.

#### **4. THE CONCEPT OF GAMES**

There are many methods and techniques to make the English teaching –learning process enjoyable and interesting. One of them is using game. A game is simplified, operational model of the real life situation that provides students with vicarious participation in a variety roles and events (Gerlach and Ely, 1980:380-381). While, Hadfield (1995: 5) claims that a game is an activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun.

A game has many benefits toward language learning. It offers students a fun-filled and relaxing learning atmosphere. After learning and practicing new vocabulary, students have the opportunity to use language in a non-stressful way (Uberman,1998). While playing games, the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. Rather than paying attention to the correctness of linguistic forms, most participants will do all they can to win. This eases the fear of negative evaluation, the concern of being negatively judged in public, and which is one of the main factors inhibiting language learners from using the target language in front of other people (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope,1986). In a game-oriented context, anxiety is reduced and speech fluency is generated--thus communicative competence is achieved.

Games are also motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. It introduces an element of competition into language-building activities. This provides valuable stimulus to a purposeful use of language (Prasad, 2003). In other words, these activities create a meaningful context for language use. The competitive ambiance also makes

learners concentrate and think intensively during the learning process, which enhances unconscious acquisition of inputs. Most students who have experienced game-oriented activities hold positive attitudes towards them (Uberman 1998). An action research conducted by Huyen and Nga (2003), students said that they liked the relaxed atmosphere, the competitiveness, and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. On the effectiveness of games, Huyen & Nga's (2003) reported that students seem to learn more quickly and retain the learning materials better in a stress-free and comfortable environment.

There are two kinds of games: competitive games, in which players or teams race to be the first to reach the goal, and co-operative games, in which players or teams work together towards a common goal. The emphasis in the games is on successful communication rather than on correctness of language (Toth,1995). Both of them can be applied in teaching to young learners. But, the teacher should keep in mind to avoid competition with preschool learners. It can be stressful and overwhelm them. Play games where everyone wins.

There are a lot of games that can be used in a classroom. In this article, the games are about vocabulary. The simplest is hangman. It is very easy and challenging for the children since if they cannot answer the word correctly in a limited time, they will be hanged in a pole. Hangman is a guessing game. The weakness of this game is the children do not know and care of its meaning. Here, the teacher should anticipate it by giving the word games in a context. The other game that usually the teacher is applied is board game or puzzle. The children should rearrange the alphabets into a meaningful word. Perhaps, the pre-school learners will find a lot of difficulties in doing this kind of activity. Teacher can help the learners by adding pictures. So, the children will have a puzzle with a picture. It will be easier for them. Another tactics can be used, by cue-cards. Teacher shows a picture with the name in few minutes. Children should watch and remember it. Some minutes later, they have the puzzle game. It can be on a card, board, even a whiteboard.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Games stand as a group of tools of language learning in real life (Misirli,2007). It mean that a game can be an effective way in learning a new language which can be created based on our real life. The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses (Deesri,2002). Besides, games have shown many advantages and effectiveness in the process of teaching and learning vocabulary in many ways. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for the students. Thus, the

teacher should help them in learning and retaining new words easily. Then, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested. These situations motivate the children to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Third, games bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance students' use of English in flexible and communicative way (Huyen and Nga, 2003). However, even though games sometimes do not work since students have different learning styles and preferences, and some other factors such as being used in an inappropriate time, the nature of games themselves, and even the nature of teachers, it is still worth trying to use them in class because they offer several good advantages to students.

Vocabulary games used in the classroom are very effective and supportive activities in contributing to students' language skills and proficiency. Unfortunately, because of limitations of time and curriculum, teachers normally have to cover all the content and materials, which students will be tested on, and it is not always easy to incorporate games into the class. Nevertheless, it can be seen that games are very useful and can be used to develop students' language learning and also provide the students an opportunity to practice communication. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers try some games that may be useful to their students in order to enhance students' proficiency and help them meet their goals, and at least to try new things in teaching. Through well-planned games, learners can practice and internalize vocabulary. Playing and competition that are provided by games enhance the motivation of the students. They also reduce the stress in the classroom. While playing games, the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. In a way, students acquire language unconsciously since their whole attention is engaged by the activity. Games provide favorable usages for extended communicative practice. They are motivating and challenging. They encourage students to interact and communicate. Through such activities students match the discourse with the context of the game. So these activities create a meaningful context for language use. The use of such activities both increases the cooperation and competition in the classroom. Thus, potential classroom ideas come into being, and a successful, joyful and enthusiastic learning is provided.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Vocabulary is the first and foremost important step in language acquisition. Students who want to learn English as their foreign language have to learn that element first. In a classroom where students are not comfortable with the second language, the teacher should make the language learning interactive and interesting with the introduction of appropriate

vocabulary exercises. Learning a new vocabulary is a hard task, especially for children. Children as young learners need an enjoyable technique in learning a new language in order to avoid their boredom. One of them is game. Children love games if their level of English, their age group, their needs are covered and also if they play it in a more cooperative way rather than a very strict competitive way which leaves many students frustrated after the game. Games offer children a fun-filled and relaxing learning atmosphere. There are many benefits of using games in learning vocabulary.

However, games are fun and they make the learning process closer to the acquisition process, which makes students learn in a more natural way. Games can encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency and communicative skills. It has high motivation because it is amusing and interesting. Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account. In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms.

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